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ABSTRACT

The influence exerted by parents on the psychological development of children in youth sports programs is examined, and the risks and benefits attendant on youth participation in sports is discussed. Parents are considered as role models for their children, and the attitudes and self-concepts a young child acquires through his or her early athletic experiences is established as the perspective most likely to remain dominant throughout the child's lifetime. Parents are counseled to be sensitive to the social as well as the athletic aspects of children's athletics, and to concentrate on establishing positive reinforcement patterns. (LH)

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SMILE PARENTS, YOUR CHILD'S WATCHING YOU

Linda K. Bunker, Ph.D.

It is a well known fact that parents, brothers and sisters have a very direct and profound effect upon the development of children. The inherited characteristics which children receive from both of their parents form an important genetic base. A foundation upon which a variety of experiences build to produce mature and competent young men and women.

Parents exert a variety of influences on the sport development of young children. Specifically, these influences may be conceptualized in terms of the following:

- (1) encouraging each child's involvement
- (2) establishing appropriate opportunities
- (3) setting a good example by being a model for participation
- (4) reinforcing involvement at whatever level
- (5) tempering social facilitation effects

In order to encourage sport participation, parents should frequently participate in sport themselves, attend live sport contests, and watch sporting events of a variety of sorts. Each of these experiences is telling your child that you value sport and that you recognize its importance. In particular, parents should be sure to reinforce the sport involvement of their own children.

Parents are not the only ones who provide important influences--either by example or reinforcement. McPherson (1973) has suggested that there are many sub-groups which provide incentives and rewards to children who participate in sport. For example, the nuclear and extended family are obvious influences, which are either supported or contradicted by such groups as the school, minor sport

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organizations, peer groups and the mass media.

One of the most powerful influences which can be exerted on children is the use of subtle comments about successful participants. For example, by pointing out local athletes who work hard and set good examples, you will transmit to your children the fact that you value hard work and effort. Similarly, adolescent peer groups generally value and reinforce sport participation. The perceived leaders of most middle schools and high schools are the athletes. These positions of leadership are sought after and valued by youth.

Brothers and sisters also exert a great deal of influence on a child's selection of sport activities. In general, if your older brothers and sisters have been active in sport you will tend to pursue similar interests. This modeling theory also explains some of the apparent sex differences in sport participation. Boys are generally reinforced for sport related behaviors and as older brothers they then establish role models associated with activity and sport involvement. If as parents, we want all of our children to be active in sport, we must reinforce older children (both boys and girls) for their participation.

Parents as Sport Participants

Parents, coaches, and sport psychologists are all extremely interested in identifying factors which stimulate children to a lifelong interest in sports. This is indeed a challenging task, and there is an abundance of information which can be quite helpful to parents wishing to interest and encourage their children in sport.

Probably the single most important thing that parents can do to interest their children in sports is to be active sport participants themselves. Children who frequently view their parents engaging in sport can identify with them and use them as effective role models. Especially when the parent's behavior while playing emphasizes fun, enjoyment, and enthusiasm. Because kids are very

desirous of moving and having fun these are behaviors that will motivate children to get interested in sports. Parents who participate themselves will "pull" by example rather than pushing by force or coercion.

These qualities are much more important to children than their parent's level of performance. Children less than 6 or 7 years of age are not interested in, nor capable of, differentiating between skilled and non-skilled performance by others. Children are continually attempting to please and gain the affection of their parents. Kids will therefore be attracted to activities which appear to capture the interest and enthusiasm of their parents. Often they will directly imitate their parents. For this reason, children will soon show an interest in playing. When this desire to participate is perceived by parents the opportunity for children to play should be enthusiastically encouraged and allowed. It is at this point that we must be certain to place the enjoyment of children ahead of ourselves. We must make certain that the early experiences with sport are filled with fun and success. An open display of pleasure and affection toward children is definitely appropriate at this time.

Unless children express an unusual interest, highly specialized and mandatory practice sessions should not be started before the age of 10. Of course, some children will be ready at an earlier time and some not until later in life. The key is to be sure that the child is not forced into lessons and practice. Too often forcing kids into sports leads them to "burn out" and lose interest at an early age. Once they express an interest, be sure to keep practices motivating and interesting to the children. Similarly if they want to play--do it; if not, don't, or create a situation in which they want to play.

Sports are sometimes viewed as a mechanism which creates more losers than winners. Ultimately, advanced sports will produce only a few fortunate winners. The majority will be losers. Often children will drop out of sports at very young ages because of repeated failure experiences, being ridiculed by other

players and/or coaches, receiving little playing time, or favoritism on the part of coaches. Parents can just as effectively discourage children by not showing interest in their participation or not observing their performance, unless, of course, they are winning. Parents and coaches should be sure to reinforce their kids for trying not matter what the outcome.

Young children need to learn to enjoy competing. If children are encouraged to compare their present performance against their own past performance rather than against others, their chances of viewing themselves as successful and increasing their self-concept will be greatly enhanced. If this happens, children will be much more likely to continue to desire to participate in sports.

Parents who expect and encourage their children to be independent and do well at an early age, tend to have children with higher levels of achievement motivation. That is, children who are reinforced for being self-reliant and for finding their own way will develop attitudes which promote success in sport and life. The relationship between independence training and the desire to do well has been well established.

Parents' general attitudes and their own personal needs have also been found to be predictive of their child-rearing practices. A parents' orientations toward their own achievement may influence their behaviors with their children in everyday achievement experiences. Parents who begin early are apt also to be the ones for whom achievement is the most important and who reward their children for successful achievement and punish them for failure. The earlier such rewards and punishments are applied, the greater the effective arousal and the larger the number of undifferentiated achievement cues from which effect is associated.

The achievement behavior of 3 to 5 year old kindergarten children has been shown to be highly correlated with the degree of positive reinforcement and recognition which they receive from their mothers and fathers for their achieve-

ment efforts. Typically parents apply the same expectations and evaluation attitudes toward achievement in their children as they do toward their own achievement. Unfortunately this may mean that low achieving parents will have negative attitudes toward achievement and low expectation, and must be taught to value achievement and to raise the expectations that they set for their children. Parents must consistently communicate positive attitudes toward achievement-related behaviors to their children.

A wide variety of child-training practices can be identified which would seem to be the most effective for developing children with high achievement motivation. The family should be characterized by high achievement oriented levels of aspiration and by warmth and harmonious personal relations. That is, in order to develop high achievement motivation, parents should assume a direct teaching role, making use of the classic principles of learning, i.e. reinforcing desirable behavior with rewards, and eliminating undesirable behavior with punishment or negative reinforcement.

Parents should be encouraged to set goals which are challenging but not too difficult to master, offer general encouragement rather than detailed instruction, and give approval when a difficult task is accomplished creditably. Parents must learn to distinguish between pushing and pulling and learn to pull children from in front (emphasizing frequently desirable goals and how good it would be to attain such goals) rather than to push children from behind (forcing them to attempt tasks). The most critical factor however is to display interest and involvement in children's achievement endeavors.

The judicious use of praise and criticism cannot be overestimated. It is well known that praise tends to raise levels of task performance while criticism tends to lower performance. Such evaluations also tend to affect the child's expectancy of success. The child who has been praised expects praise--a good example of self-fulfilling prophecy. When silence is encountered the child may

lower expectancy of success as much as if having been criticized.

Mothers must be certain that they do not transmit their fears and anxieties of sport participation to their offspring. Similarly, fathers must be careful not to discourage their daughters from sport participation because of their fear of masculinizing their daughters or discourage males from "female" sports. As parents, we often unconsciously encourage, or discourage, our children from participating.

A variety of research efforts have shown that children who participate in sport during their developmental years tend to be more successful as adult participants. Mothers and fathers must be careful to conceal any doubts or fears which they may have, in order to encourage all children to participate. For example, it has been shown that first born children are generally taught to be less aggressive, more prone to guilt feelings, more conforming to their peers, more likely to fear physical harm and more apt to avoid dangerous or high risk sports. It appears that the first born receives much more emotional concern and anxiety, transmitted from their parents.

We must provide wide varieties of experiences for our children, especially for firstborn children. The fears, hopes and anxieties that we as parents have for the health and safety of our children are often unconsciously transmitted. Environments should be provided which encourage exploration and creativity of behavior--challenge children and they will respond with new experiences and increased capabilities.

Emphasize the Positive

We must emphasize the positive side rather than the negative aspects of each individual's performance. Situations should be planned, especially in the early stages of practice, which will cause the young athlete to feel successful. The practice environment should lead the young athlete to leave practice with feelings of pride rather than shame. By utilizing this approach to coaching, we will

motivate athletes to continue to be attracted to sports participation. Furthermore, the athletes coached in this manner are likely to be desirous of learning what their weaknesses or mistakes are and be willing to work to improve on them.

Young athletes have had a limited range of experiences. They do not yet know if they possess great, average, or poor athletic ability. The youngsters who are constantly told by their parents or coaches that they are talented, and are made to feel that way, often will start believing that they are, indeed, very talented. Athletes who believe they are talented will often perform as if they are--a self-fulfilling prophecy. What the athletes believe about themselves is often more important than the ability each individual actually has.

Initially the young athlete should receive frequent and consistent reinforcements in the form of verbal praise, pats on the back, and smiles of approval for their efforts. An abundance of criticism will cause the child to lose confidence in his ability and therefore lower his level of aspiration. It takes a special kind of adult to be able to find something good to say to each child. Anyone can find a way to crush a child's ego with--"Lyn, you blockhead, can't you catch anything but a cold" or "Oh brother, we've got butterfingers Bobbie on our team." Such comments can have a devastating effect on the young athlete's self-concept and desire to participate.

It is critical that we find ways to make all children feel good about themselves, even if it is only in relation to how well they look in their uniform, or how well they run the bases or block. With time however, positive reinforcement and rewards should be handed out with greater selectivity, and less frequently. Praise should be given only when the young athlete has improved, or excited great effort in attempting to improve.

Children participate in sport for a variety of reasons. But when asked the major reason, 93% of the boys and 96% of the girls in Michigan youth sport study

answered that it was to "have fun." Approximately 80% of the 11 to 18 year olds also claimed they participated to "improve their sport skills." One interesting finding was that when parents were asked why they allowed or encouraged participation, 94% said it was what the "child wanted to do," whereas only 31% of the athletes indicated "parental influence" as the reason for joining (Sapp and Haubenstricker, 1978).

Awards and Motivation

Youth sport teams typically provide a wide variety of awards in the form of trophies, plaques, jackets, ribbons, certificates, etc., to motivate team members to practice harder. We must carefully consider the possible positive and negative effects of these rewards on both the immediate and future performances of youth athletes. Athletes who participate in sport because they really enjoy it, wish to master and have control of the skills, or display and feel competent are likely to practice diligently over extended periods and perform at a higher level. These athletes are considered to be internally controlled and self-motivated, in contrast to athletes who participate mainly for some reward. Participants who play because of external rewards are extrinsically controlled, and not as likely to be highly motivated as the internally controlled athletes.

Most children enter into youth sports with a high level of intrinsic motivation. It appears that a child's intrinsic motivation might be detrimentally affected by the frequent distribution of awards that is so commonplace in today's youth sport programs. Most likely we are unintentionally causing many youth who were originally intrinsically motivated and attracted to sport to become extrinsically motivated.

The extrinsically motivated child would be apt to display an increase in immediate performance when awards are presented. Extrinsic rewards for child-

ren under seven years appear to be quite effective. At this young age reward is viewed as a bonus. But after the age of seven, children begin to view rewards given merely for participating as a bribe which causes a motivational decrement. In addition, the long range effects of extrinsic motivation, are not nearly as appealing as are the effect of intrinsic motivation. It would be expected that the extrinsically motivated child would withdraw from participating if the rewards are withdrawn.

Social Facilitation

One of the most dramatic influences on a child's motor skills occurs when someone observes their performance. We have all had the experience of participating in a well-learned sport when suddenly someone we know shows up to observe our physical prowess. And what happens?--We fold or choke. Our natural reaction is to begin to think about the audience, and how they are evaluating us and then our skills vanish.

This phenomenon is known as social facilitation and has been described as the effect which the presence of others has on one's behavior or performance. This effect can be either positive or negative depending on a variety of factors.

For example, one major element contributing to the impact of social facilitation is the perceived importance or significance of the audience. An audience of complete strangers seems to have little effect on performance, especially when compared to the potential effect of having parents or boyfriends or girlfriends in the audience. The impact of these "significant others" cannot be overestimated.

The nature of the audience also varies depending on the evaluative capacity of the groups. If a child is playing in front of a group of unknown children, the "stakes" are not as high. On the other hand, if you are on your home court, or in front of your super critical father, the potential effect can be phenomenal. This reaction was demonstrated recently by the great women's tennis player,

Chris Evert, who played her first tournament in her Florida hometown. Chris lost the first round for the first time in seven years! When interviewed afterward, she commented that each time a critical shot came up, she wanted to be so good, she played it safe and conservatively, in hopes of not disappointing the audience.

In Chris Evert's case, the audience was perceived as being very important, and capable of making specific and critical judgments about her performance. Thus, the capability of the audience to make evaluative judgments is critical, as is the perceived significance of the audience. Researchers have found that observers who are directly involved or concerned for performers have a much greater influence on performance (i.e. frat brothers or Boy Scout troupe members) (Cottrell, 1968).

Social facilitation effects are also observed in relation to the sport experience itself (Zajonc, 1965). In particular, two distinct situations have been noted: a coaction condition and a competitive condition. In coaction, a child's performance changes as a result of simultaneous participation. For example, two children may be bowling on side-by-side lanes--and even though they are not directly competing, their simultaneous performance will have an effect on each other.

An even more dramatic effect can be seen on children when they compete directly. The dominant response hypotheses becomes even more obvious when young performers or teams compete directly.

Arousal and Anxiety

Many parents, teachers and coaches believe that the best way for an individual to be prepared for a new learning situation, or especially for an athletic contest, is to increase arousal levels and motivation to their maximal level. Too often the view is held that if athletes are not "sky high" or "psyched up," they are not mentally prepared to learn or perform. Seldom is it realized that the prepared and self-confident learner or athlete is the relaxed or only moderately aroused individual.

It is now a well established fact that individuals, whether students or athletes, do not necessarily perform all skills most effectively when arousal levels are extremely high. Coaches and teachers must be able to identify the optimal levels of arousal required to produce maximum performance results. Once these levels have been identified it may be possible to determine how best to control and/or manipulate arousal levels. In general, it has been found that for each and every sport or skill, an individual needs to be aroused to a level above his or her normal, resting state, but not too high. The implication of this concept is obvious, in that persons who are apathetic or under-aroused may require experiences that cause an increase in arousal levels (i.e. to be "psyched up"), while performers whose arousal levels are already quite high (especially athletes before game time) may profit most from reducing anxiety.

The relationship between an athlete's level of arousal and motor performance is an excellent example of the hypothesized Inverted-U relationship. This concept implies that for optimal performance, each individual must attain an intermediate or moderate level of arousal. At the two extremes, either very low or high arousal levels, the performance or behavior may appear quite similar. For example, a basketball player performing optimally may be able to make 90% of the free throws attempted. But under different conditions may perform at a 50% level of efficiency. Given the Inverted-U hypothesis, this could be the result of either being under-aroused or over-aroused. The coach whose team performs poorly in an important game must be careful to avoid making the assumption that the

 Insert Inverted-U Figure near here

players were "not psyched up," for it may be equally as likely that the team was "psyched out," perhaps because of over-arousal.

Basketball Freethrow Example

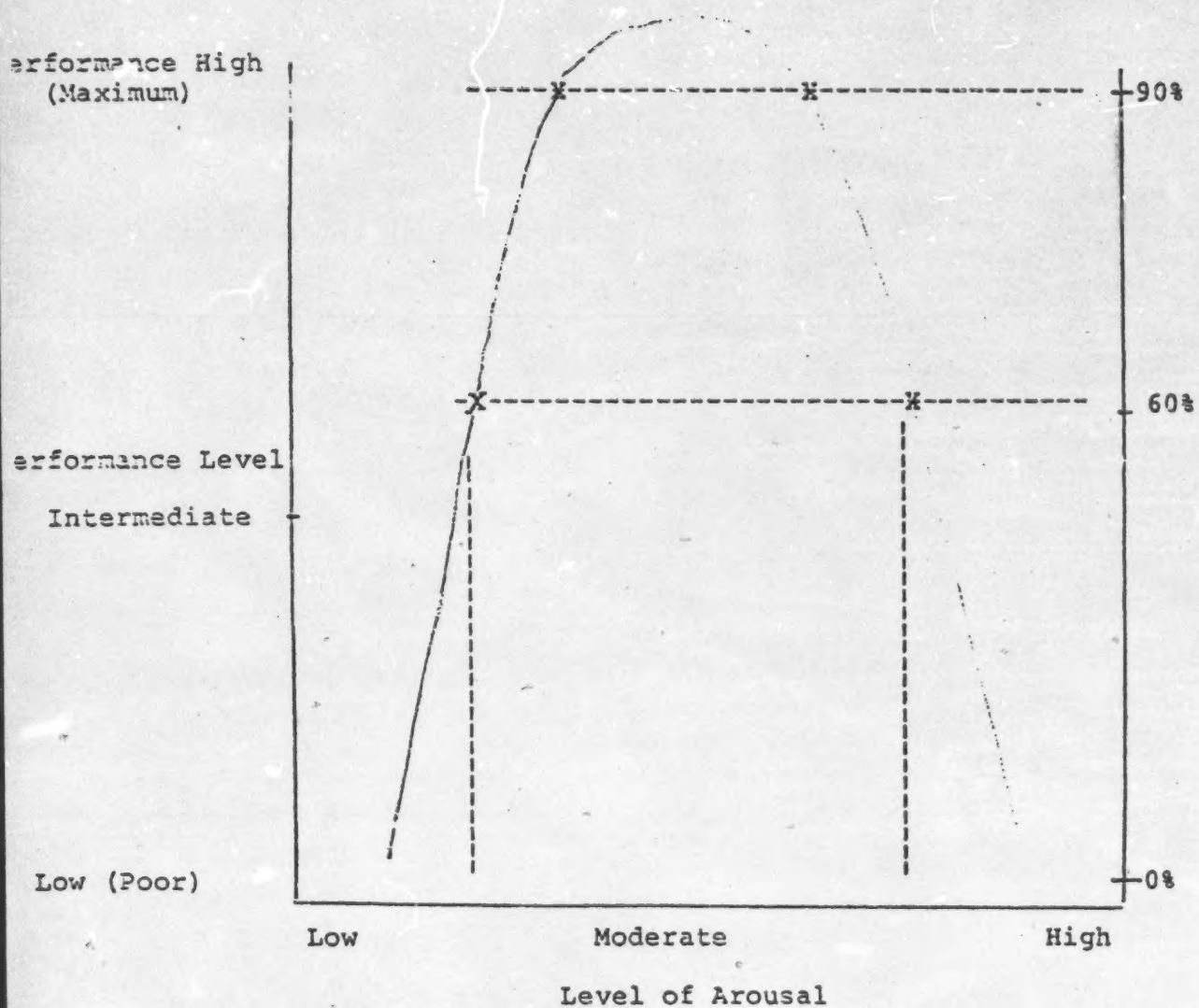


Figure 1. Inverted-U Hypothesis Relating to Interaction of Arousal and Performance

The degree of arousal exhibited by each athlete is directly related to the perceived significance of the situation. This significance is obviously differentially ascribed to each contest or practice situation by each individual athlete. It may be related to such things as the importance of the event, the incentive value of the game, the perceived danger, the social importance, the presence of parents or loved ones in the audience, or the evaluative potential of a situation. For example, we can all identify with the changes in arousal levels and performance when some important figure comes to observe, when the parents of your freshman star are in the audience for the first time, or when the "arch rival" is the opponent in a contest. On the other hand, low arousal levels can be observed to have a negative effect on such things as the last game of the season when the team is already in last (or first) place, or when the basketball score is quite far apart. For example, it has been found that shooting percentage is related to the closeness of a game. That is, if the game score is moderately close (i.e. 5-8 points) the shooting percentage was optimized (72%) but if the difference was 9 points or more, shooting percentage was only 55%, and if the game was too close (1-4 points) and players tended to be over-aroused, the percentage fell to 53% (Abart, 1973).

The impact of specific degrees of activation on performance also appears to be affected by a number of factors, including the nature of the task to be performed, and certain characteristics of the individual. This interaction of individual and situation is a key principle which may account for the unique effect of each individual's performance at what appears to be similar levels of activation. It therefore appears that under similar conditions or situations, individuals differ in both the degree of induced arousal, as well as the sensitivity of response (i.e. speed of response and later return to the former level of functioning). The implications are obvious--group "psych-up" techniques must be carefully utilized.

Individual Consistency of Response

Individuals respond to varying levels of activation in very individualistic ways. That is, both the degree of arousal and speed of response have been shown to vary from individual to individual (inter-individual variability), although a certain level of consistency of response can be expected within any one athlete (intra-individual consistency). Athletes who tend to respond with greater intensity in one situation will, in general, respond with higher levels of intensity in other situations. Different individuals appear to vary in terms of their central tendency to be responsive, with those who are easily aroused, or more responsive, consistently showing their responsiveness in many different forms. To be able to recognize the "hyper" athletes and calm them down, while simultaneously recognizing the underaroused child and "psyching that person up" becomes the mark of the truly great coach, parent or teacher.

Skill Levels

The negative effects of stress seem to be particularly apparent in beginners, or in performers who are not proficient in a given skill or aspect of the game (Carron, 1965). This may have been predicted since beginners are more likely to make mistakes, and in general whatever response is most predictable, will occur in stressful situations. On the other hand, for advanced players the dominant or the most likely response (the one with the highest probability of occurring) will be a correct response. Advanced performers may therefore be facilitated by increased arousal levels, while the performance of beginners may be impaired.

This "dominant response" hypothesis is an important concept for all levels of performance. To reiterate, this concept suggests that as arousal increases the dominant response will be emitted. That is, the response with the highest probability of occurring will be demonstrated. For beginners that is likely to be an incorrect response, a missed shot, a failure to set the screen, etc., while for advanced players it may mean a successful shot, an extra fake, or a beautiful drive and score.

For parents and coaches, the implications are quite significant. The following list of applications may help illustrate the application of this concept.

- Use tried-and-true, well rehearsed plays in the critical situations.
- Avoid teaching new plays or skills the day before an important contest.
- When the score is close, use well-learned skills.
- Do not try to break bad habits during the game.

The fact that high arousal levels are not conducive to beginners, or to anyone learning a new skill has several implications for teaching. During the introduction of new material, or practice of new skills, arousal levels should be held at a low level. Practice and learning sessions should be interesting, well organized and enjoyable. Competitive situations (i.e. games and relays) should be used for motivational purposes with great caution, since the increased individual activation may retard learning and/or performance of the newer skills.

Levels of activation are affected by the presence of an audience, or individuals who may be "judging" or "evaluating" the athlete. New skills should therefore be taught without an audience since beginners tend to perform at lower levels when other people are present, especially if they are serving in an evaluative capacity. On the other hand, more proficient athletes may respond positively to socially facilitating situations. A similar finding exists when proficient athletes attempt to perform newly acquired skills while under competitive stress, and find their performances inhibited. (We wouldn't bring an audience into a fourth grade reading class!)

Athletes can be seen practicing their favorite shots during pre-practice warm-ups. Many athletes avoid practicing their weaker skills because they are either embarrassed or because they know that people are watching and their performance will be even worse than ever. One good practice technique would be to

have athletes rank-order their five worse skills (or new, desired skills) and then devote ten minutes of each practice session to individual work on these skills. This specifically devoted time will allow athletes to help themselves and each other without fear of evaluation.

Task Complexity

Each type of skill may be individually responsive to various levels of arousal or anxiety. For example, relatively simple tasks can generally be performed when arousal levels are higher, compared to complex tasks which are generally performed better at lower levels of arousal. This might be explained by the dominant response hypothesis since complex tasks have a higher probability of incorrect components and would therefore be more sensitive to the negative effects of arousal. High levels of arousal also seem to affect skills requiring accuracy, balance and precision more negatively than skills requiring strength or power.

The implications of this concept can be seen in both good coaching practice and strategic "psych-out" behaviors of the opposition. For example, a player who is about to attempt a tie-breaking free-throw should be encouraged to relax and therefore reduce the level of arousal. Opposing coaches often attempt to increase that same level by calling a time-out in order to let the athlete "think about" how crucial the free-throw may be and therefore unconsciously raise their arousal level and reduce the probability of success.

The somewhat oversimplified generalization that high levels of arousal may facilitate tasks requiring strength and speed, must be carefully and cautiously applied to most motor skills, since there are few skills in sporting situations which require massive strength alone. Most performance tasks require some degree of accuracy and/or decision making, from the preceding discussion it is obvious that these skills may be interfered with if arousal levels are too high. For example, a center about to execute a jumpball must be mentally alert and pre-

pared to make split second decisions, as well as produce strength and power in order to "get the tip."

Ideally, it would be quite beneficial if we could rank order motor skills in terms of some continuum such as precision and accuracy vs. strength and speed, and therefore be able to predict what level of arousal would produce maximum performance results. Such a listing would be difficult, although in general the skills such as free-throw shooting and passes from out-of-bounds would be better conducted under lower levels of arousal, than whereas fast breaks and rebounding may benefit from higher levels, or at least wider range of arousal.

It has been suggested that the nature of the task, in terms of all requirements, including difficulty, might change the shape of the inverted-U curve. Fiske and Maddi (1961) have suggested that the more difficult the task the narrower the inverted-U, and consequently the smaller the range of arousal levels which will produce optimal results. The complex interaction of such things as strength or energy requirements combine with task difficulty to even further reduce the range of optimal arousal. The implications here are obvious, with certain sport skills, i.e. gymnastics apparatus activities, which are high in both dimensions, being particularly difficult to attain.

In general it is now believed that highly anxious performers may require calming down rather than "psyching up." But unfortunately, the overly anxious athlete often is accused of lack of motivation or not being "ready" because of their poorer performance. Coaches and teachers often mis-diagnose the cause of this decrease in level of attainment and attempt to increase the motivational drive or stressors, and thereby cause even worse performance. It is a vicious cycle--poor performance causes greater stress which causes even poorer performance.

Establishing Desired Arousal Levels

The inverted-U hypothesis has been proposed as an explanation for the non-linear affect of arousal on performance. In our earlier example, it was shown that basketball players may shoot 50% of their free throws under either of two arousal levels, slightly under-aroused or over-aroused (see Figure 1). The teacher or coach must therefore attempt to ascertain the particular athlete's arousal level. One approach might be to systematically observe increase or decrease the arousal level and the accompanying changes in performance. If performance improves with increased arousal, or in "close contests" the initial level would be determined to be less than optimal. On the other hand, if performance deteriorates, it might be suspected that the earlier level was already too high for maximum performance or learning.

Several factors have been identified as critical in evaluating the effects of various levels of arousal on performance:

1. Individual personality traits of each performer (i.e. trait anxiety)
2. Initial level of learning (i.e. beginner vs. advanced performer)
3. Task requirements, including: complexity, physical fitness demands, accuracy or precision demands
4. New or unusual environmental factors (i.e. home court, strange playing surface)
5. Self-perception or self-assessment of the individuals competence (i.e. confidence)
6. Social-facilitation effects on performance (i.e. audience response)

The implications here should be obvious to both the teacher and coach. In order to expect both optimal learning or acquisition of new skills, or performance of formerly learned skills the evaluation and adjustment of arousal levels must

be a conscious consideration. It is not possible to change the nature of the game to optimize performance, but it is possible to train players to control their own internal states. Performers can learn to monitor, control and change their internal states. The following sections are therefore devoted to a discussion of techniques which may be used to control or alter individual activation levels with the emphasis on techniques designed to help athletes lower arousal level because this is the most prominent problem.

Parental Guidance in Selecting Sport Activities

Parents will likely have an important influence on many sport-related decisions that their children will have to make. Careful thought should go into each and every decision made about sport participation. For example, when asked which sports should my children participate in, the best suggestion we can give is that younger children should be influenced to participate in a variety of team, individual, and lifetime sports. This does not necessarily mean that children have to strive for excellence of performance in all. It merely means that parents should plan for a variety of skills to be developed which will encourage both short term participation as well as long term sport participation.

Through team sports children can learn to work with others to attain a goal. Team experiences are similar to many work experiences encountered later in life. In the team sport experience athletes do not have to have all of the pressure of winning or losing on their shoulders alone. There are great benefits in having others with whom to share victory and defeat. Also, in team sports there is often room for athletes with very specific skills. Thus, there may be a place for an athlete with one highly refined skill who is not as strong in all other aspects of the game. This is not true in individual sports. Of course, a weakness in exclusively team sport participation is that in adult life it may be difficult to get enough players together to play a large team sport.

Individual sports teach athletes to take responsibility for their own successes or failures. It can be a very positive experience but it can also be a very demoralizing and lonely experience to young participants who continually lose. However, individual sports have the advantage of being able to be practiced and played alone or with one other. The highly motivated athlete will not be frustrated by the lack of motivation on the part of others. They also may be played throughout life. Therefore, enjoyment will be received all through life as will the possible physical and psychological health benefits. Clearly, the physiological benefits differ greatly from sport to sport.

Many team and individual sport programs are provided at little or no charge for instructions and equipment by the community. Some sports may be quite expensive. In many cases parents will have to pay for both special instruction as well as travel to competitive events.

A variety of other factors might also be considered. Size and ability level of the child as well as susceptibility to injury will be discussed by other presenters. For the present we cannot overemphasize the importance of parental encouragement. That is not to say that parents should get carried away by the glamour and attention associated with high level athletic success, but that they should provide opportunities and reinforcement for the development of skill. Parents generally wish to have their children involved in athletics for the success and happiness it may bring to their children. We must never allow our own desire for sport success or our own frustrations over lack of success in sports to control the treatment of our children. Most children will only be able to reap the joys of sport if allowed to develop at their own rate.

The most important point for truly loving parents is to be able to look back as their children mature and know that they did everything possible for their children to have a chance to be happy and successful in sport.

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